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Mr R Eyre-Brook
Headteacher
Culvers House Primary School
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Mitcham
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Dear Mr Eyre-Brook

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Culvers House Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 March 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement, which were identified during that inspection, is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Sutton.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009

- Increase the proportion of good teaching and eliminate inadequate teaching by:
 - ensuring activities and the pace of lessons meet the needs of individual pupils
 - providing marking that consistently gives pupils advice on how they can improve their learning
 - providing learning targets that are focused and manageable.

- Ensure the curriculum promotes effective progress in each subject by:
 - providing work that securely builds on pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - developing the teachers' skills to engage pupils more actively in their learning.

- Take more urgent action to raise pupils' achievement by:
 - rigorously evaluating the impact of provision, particularly teaching, on pupils' learning
 - using assessment information accurately to track pupils' progress and
 - ensure that learning activities meet their needs.

Special measures: monitoring of Culvers House Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 March 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the senior and middle leaders, a small group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and one of the local authority's appointed governors, the link adviser and the School Improvement Partner.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the assistant headteacher, responsible for Key Stage 2 and leading literacy, took up his post in January. A second assistant headteacher has been appointed and will work in the school for one day each week during the summer term before taking up the post permanently in September 2011. Few pupils have left or joined the school since the last visit.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils relish their learning and the opportunity to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do. In all lessons observed during the monitoring visit, pupils worked engagingly. In discussion with a small but representative group of pupils, they commented on the changes in their learning, most notably that work is more challenging and presented in a fun and interesting way, with teachers using games and short activities to motivate them. Pupils feel they are making better progress and the current assessment data, which has been moderated, confirm that this is the case. Most pupils, in particular those in Years 6, 4 and 2, are meeting age-related expectations with a minority exceeding their targets. In other year groups, pupils' progress, although improving, tends to be uneven and is slightly lower. This is because pupils are still catching up from a low base and the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good enough to accelerate their progress. Higher attaining pupils are in line to meet their targets; however, those with a statement of special educational needs make much slower progress than their peers in their academic attainment.

The school has identified weaknesses in reading and writing and has taken swift action to promote better achievement in these areas of pupils' work. Effective strategies have been used to develop reading and writing to stimulate pupils from as early as Reception. Current assessment data for children in Early Years Foundation Stage indicate that the majority are meeting age-related expectations, with a small minority exceeding them.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Take more urgent action to raise pupils' achievement – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

In all lessons observed, pupils' attitudes and their behaviour were at least good. They concentrated very well and even when explanations are long, they are keen to show how well they are listening. They treat each other, including adults and visitors, with respect and courtesy. The school is a safe place and pupils recognise that their teachers ensure they are well protected. Furthermore, pupils say that the clear school rules have made a 'good difference' to their behaviour, as 'unruly or harmful behaviour is not acceptable'.

Pupils' behaviour in the playground is good as is their cooperation with adults when they are required to follow the established routine before entering lessons. Pupils explained, as observed, that they 'crouch down and wait quietly to line up when the bell rings'. Pupils understand what it means to follow a healthy lifestyle and can talk about important nutrients such as proteins, vitamins and calcium in their diet.

Attendance has been low since the start of the academic year. Ill-health and poor weather conditions, when combined, have lowered the rate of attendance. However, attendance is also low because of the persistent absence of a small minority of pupils. Attendance is given a high priority and the staff work hard to promote it by using rewards and working with external agencies to reach out to parents. This ensures that there is a clear channel of communication with parents about the consequences of low attendance. The school has not shirked from taking stringent action, which has led to a minority of persistent absentees attending more regularly.

The effectiveness of provision

All lessons observed were at least satisfactory. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has sustained the focus on accelerating pupils' progress by developing the quality of teaching further. In the most effective lessons, well-structured planning included clear learning objectives and targets for different groups of pupils. Teachers focused on the skills pupils were learning, and the teaching methodology and resources were carefully selected to ensure that they could make at least good progress. The pace of teaching was therefore fast, and skills were consolidated through gradually introducing and building on new concepts. This was also backed up by the teachers demonstrating and encouraging pupils to apply their new skills while providing feedback to the class. This approach helped pupils to learn very well, particularly as they were made aware of how they could develop their work to produce, for example, a polished piece of writing, or work out the process used to solve mathematical problems. The teachers also used a range of questions and the interactive whiteboard very well to record, develop and summarise ideas. In these lessons, teaching assistants were well deployed; they echoed the teachers' work and enabled the pupils being supported to keep up with the work by referring to their set targets, giving clear instructions and working through further examples with them.

In the satisfactory lessons, teachers often talked for too long. They missed opportunities to allow pupils to think for themselves and explain their ideas. Additionally, pace was not fast enough and teaching assistants were not always used well.

Although the procedures for marking are well developed, the very good attention given to commenting on pupils' work is not consistent in all year groups. Where good quality marking is well established, as in Year 6, there is a running commentary on pupils' work and a detailed summary of strengths and areas for improvement. Pupils know their targets but all are still not clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

Changes to the curriculum are beginning to provide richer and stimulating experiences for pupils. A programme of curriculum development has begun and includes introducing the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) in September 2011. The school has undertaken research and used its findings to make an informed choice. As a result, links have been established with schools using the IPC and training is planned. Currently, the school has rightly broadened the curriculum to give more balance and depth. Further improvements include subjects such as singing lessons, special projects, art and improved information and communication technology (ICT) equipment and resources. Additionally, each day begins with a range of literacy and numeracy clubs and booster sessions, so pupils arrive to lessons motivated and ready to learn. These extra before-school activities are contributing to pupils developing better literacy and numeracy skills. In science, steps are being taken to develop planning so pupils can do more practical and investigative work. Further work is planned to extend the ICT and science curriculum.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Increase the proportion of good teaching and eliminate inadequate teaching – good.
- Ensure the curriculum, promotes effective progress in each subject – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher is in full control of the changes and is providing very clear direction for the school. The planned improvements are explicit and supported by a number of well-developed management systems, such as the use of assessment information to monitor pupils' attainment and progress. The drive for improvement is well structured and the senior team has been strengthened by the additional appointments. The workload is well distributed and the team works productively. The work of the interim assistant headteacher to develop middle managers is fully appreciated, as is the work of the consultant headteacher who occasionally provides advice to the senior team. At this stage of the school's journey to improving its

effectiveness, the senior staff are no longer reliant on external support from the local authority. This is because the school's evaluation of its work, including the use of assessment data, is increasingly rigorous and accurate. External validation of the data and monitoring and evaluation confirms this. There is a strong thrust to improve teaching and learning. There is clarity about priorities and the critical steps the school faces. This has enabled staff to be clearly focused on improving the essential areas for development – teaching and learning and using assessment data analytically to drive improvement. Weaknesses in teaching have therefore been targeted and individualised support provided to ensure that the quality of teaching can move from satisfactory to good. As a result, teachers are more aware of how to begin applying the known criteria to teach an effective lesson. Similarly, gaps in pupils' knowledge are being tackled head on, through, for example, 'precision teaching', which involves individual teaching assistants tutoring targeted pupils to develop basic skills in reading, spelling and writing.

Leadership at senior level is being developed well, though the middle leaders are still experiencing gradual professional development in relation to managing and using assessment data and monitoring and evaluating their areas of responsibility. Middle leaders have a sound understanding of their role and, since the last monitoring visit, they have taken further steps to lead their curriculum areas, for example, introducing planning formats and inducting other staff.

The management of provision in the 'Base' for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. There is a clear and strategic understanding of the needs of these pupils. The school's self evaluation of provision in the Nursery has identified weaknesses which are being tackled well to ensure that children can sustain good progress as they do in Reception and when they enter Year 1.

The governing body has sustained the good level of challenge noted in the last monitoring report. It questions and seeks answers about pupils' progress and ensures that assessment data are scrutinised and the rate of progress made by individuals or groups are kept under scrutiny. Under the Chair of the Governing Body, governors are actively involved in the school. They keep parents well informed about the school's work and fulfil safeguarding and other requirements.

External support

The very good support from the local authority has helped the school to increase its capacity to determine its own agenda without constant supervision and advice. The level of support, training, advice and challenge from the School Improvement Partner, the link adviser and consultants has contributed to a faster pace of change since the previous monitoring inspection. For example, the work on improving teaching has led to pupils making better progress and the helpful advice on transition from Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 1 is having a direct impact on provision. Consequently, the local authority has begun to develop its exit strategy.